

New research funding structure will support the ecosystem-based management of the
Baltic Sea

Kaisa Kononen and Andris Andrusaitis
kaisa.kononen@bonuseeig.fi, andris.andrusaitis@bonuseeig.fi
Baltic Organisations Network for Funding Science EEIG
Hämeentie 33
00520 Helsinki
Finland

Ecosystem-based management has become a corner stone in the modern marine environment management strategies and directives. It is a management approach, which is relying on information derived from the scientific knowledge of the marine ecosystem structure and function under external forcing. The conditions for the successful application of the ecosystem-based management are that (1) research is producing the knowledge required for decision making on environment management issues, (2) there are contact surfaces between scientists and decision makers and (3) there are appropriate mechanisms for synthesis and analysis of knowledge. These conditions do not evolve by themselves. How could they be fostered ?

A major driving force for new research is research itself – a new finding usually generates new scientific questions and challenges the curiosity of the researcher. It is the challenge to the RTD authorities to make this selfdirectioning knowledge producing process to proceed into the direction, which in the best way gives benefit to the society. The main tool serving that purpose is research funding, which is channeled through a research programmes addressing the questions of societal importance.

Reduction of the fragmentation of the research policy landscape in Europe is one of the key priorities of the European Union's 7th Framework Programme. Following this objective the nine research funding agencies around the Baltic Sea joined their forces, and systematically developed a joint Baltic Sea Research Programme, BONUS. The funding cooperation has been institutionalized through the establishment of the 'Baltic Organisations Network of Funding Science EEIG' – BONUS EEIG. In 2009 the cooperation is planned to achieve a new status when the European Commission will make a legislative proposal aiming at implementing this programme under Article 169 of the EC Treaty.

The goal of the Programme is to create a cooperative, interdisciplinary, well integrated and focused transnational research programme that would potentially constitute the scientific pillar of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region. First of all, the Programme will provide scientific outputs that facilitate the implementation of ecosystem-based management of the Baltic Sea environmental issues. The aim is to form the basis for prudent management aimed at safeguarding the sustainable use of the ecosystem's goods and services.

The first call for proposals with total funding of ca 22 million euro and jointly funded by the national funding agencies and the European Commission was opened in the fall 2007. It was received well by the scientific community with over 900 participations in the Letter of Intent phase. After the scientific and relevance evaluation process altogether 16 projects receive funding.

Coordination of the research to be funded is an instrumental part of the funding cooperation. The strategy is described in the 'BONUS-169 Science Plan and Implementation Strategy' (Hopkins et al. 2006). The novelty is the firm involvement of both scientists and knowledge endusers in the programme. One of the challenges is to 'de-fragment' the research efforts now spread over various sectors, such as environmental protection, food and agriculture, fisheries, transportation and energetic, spatial development, health etc. With this purpose BONUS has developed a three-phase process of integration of the sector related research in the region. As a European scale pioneer in the integration of marine research, BONUS possesses a multitude of unique experience which is already being actively shared with the other European regional seas, e.g. the Mediterranean and the Black Sea.

References:

Hopkins C.C.E., J. Thulin, J.G. Sutinen, K. Kononen, P. Snoeijs, S. Johansson & H.-O. Nalbach 2006. BONUS-169 Baltic Sea Science Plan and Implementation Strategy. BONUS Publication No. 5.